DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 044 979 FL 002 010

AUTHOR Crosbie, Keith
TITLE Possible Impact of the Elimination of FL Requirements in Colleges and Universities.
INSTITUTION Pacific Northwest Conference on Foreign Languages, Portland, Oreg.
PUB DATE 70
NOTE 7p.; Appears in "Proceedings: Pacific Northwest Conference on Foreign Languages, 21st Annual Meeting, Vol. 21," Ed. Ralph W. Baldner, p321-327

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.45
DESCRIPTORS Classical Languages, Colleges, Core Courses, *Degree Requirements, *Graduation Requirements, Language Instruction, *Modern Languages, School Surveys, Student Attitudes, Student Interests, *Surveys, *Universities

ABSTRACT

This conference paper includes two major sections. A summary of a report made by Mr. John Dusel to the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages on December 1-2, 1969 focuses on results of a survey of college foreign language requirements in some 40 states and on general implications suggested by a general abandonment of such requirements. Excerpts concerning the problem are taken from the "Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) Bulletin" and reflect student unrest. Finally, status reports of 14 institutions of higher learning are presented. (RL)

ED 044979

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

POSSIBLE IMPACT OF THE ELIMINATION OF FL REQUIREMENTS IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Keith Crosbie,
Foreign Language Consultant, State of Montana
(Read by Robert Hamilton)

I. Summary of Report made by Mr. John Dusel, Foreign Language Consultant, State of California, to National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages at New Orleans, December 1-2, 1969.

A. Forty states as well as the District of Columbia and Guam returned questionnaires which had requested the names of colleges and universities that have recently eliminated (or are discussing the possibility of eliminating) their foreign language requirements for college entrance, for the AB degree, or for the Ph.D. degree.

1. Of 40 states answering questionnaires, 21 states and Guam showed no recent change in foreign language requirements, although four (Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, and Texas) stated that the topic is being discussed.

2. Three states were not able to gather information; one of these has no state supervisor for foreign languages.

3. Detailed answers were submitted by sixteen state foreign language supervisors or other personnel attesting to the fact that the college foreign language requirements have changed recently. Data were received from Maryland concerning changes in requirements in the District of Columbia.

4. Ten states did not respond to the questionnaire.

B. Even though a majority of the states have not experienced recent change in the foreign language requirement, such a number of colleges and universities have made alterations in entrance or degree requirements that we are showing our concern by including this topic on our program here today. This movement to eliminate the foreign language requirement may affect all American students in time.

Chairmen of departments of foreign languages in American colleges and universities met in 1968 to discuss common problems, and as a result of these discussions formed an association in March 1969 which will deal directly with this crisis. The Association of

FL 002 010

Foreign Languages (ADFL) has as its sponsor the Modern Language Association.

In September 1969 the first bulletin of the Association devoted many pages to the topic of foreign language requirements. The December issue will include such articles as "Defenses and Responses to Attacks on the FL Requirement" and "How to Live Without a FL Requirement," and the MLA annual meeting in Denver has scheduled discussions on these topics.

Such a movement to eliminate foreign language requirements for college entrance would receive my support only if all other specific subject areas were also removed from the required list. Flexibility in choosing courses should not be given to students at the expense of foreign languages. If we subscribe to a "cafeteria selection" type of opportunity for students rather than a required list of basic subjects for general education, then a student should be allowed to decide if he wishes to take art or music or history or English or science, for example. If we feel that foreign language is part of the basic curriculum, then we should not be in favor of eliminating only foreign languages from a list of required subjects.

The removal of all required subjects from the high school and college educational program would be a wonderful challenge to foreign language educators. No high school teacher could then hide behind the protective screen which the college foreign language requirement affords. No longer could he justify dull monotonous subject matter or uninspired teaching by saying "The college people require that you study this." College professors of foreign language who are poor instructors would have to improve their teaching techniques. The content of college foreign language courses which are presently academic exercises must be replaced if students are to be lured into them. If foreign language teachers, both high school and college, do not improve their teaching, students will choose other subjects that seem vital to life and living. If foreign language teachers do not improve their teaching, the registration for foreign language classes will plummet.

The college students' rebellion against academic requirements of any kind may well be rooted in the poor teaching found at elementary or secondary school levels. Let us be concerned with pollution at its source. When a plant wilts, I look at the ground to see if it is dry. Boring instruction at elementary levels will have a deleterious effect upon the fruit of our labor.

II. The FL Requirement -- Excerpts from ADFL Bulletin, September 1969

One of the incontrovertible "facts of life" in our profession this year is that it is under attack. Primarily the criticism is aimed

at FL requirements for the B.A. degree, often as part of a generalized attack on all degree requirements. The following is an excerpt from a report on curricular revision by a student advisory committee at Indiana University. The statement seems typical of the serious and firm conviction with which many students are approaching the question of college requirements. (For the response of the Indiana faculty, see the next section, "FL Requirements: Some Status Reports.")

"Satisfaction of a foreign language requirement shall not be needed. This recommendation is consistent with the fact that, inevitably, the student is the best, if not only, possible judge of his own academic needs.

"Many students have no need for a foreign language. Those who should study languages are or can be made aware of their own needs with the aid of counselors.

"A recent alumni survey has indicated that knowledge of a foreign language is not necessary to a good education for the modern world. Eighteen semester-hours of a language is not sufficient for a student to become conversant in the language, nor is he skilled enough to enjoy reading literature or newspaper. Such study does not provide deep insights into the culture. More effective ways to learn about foreign cultures might be to study contemporary history, government, anthropology, and culture. Foreign literature is valuable for studying means of ordering reality, but most foreign literature can be effectively offered in English. Much of this is being done now. The language requirement keeps otherwise qualified students out of Arts and Sciences.

"The contention that a 100-200 level sequence in a foreign language will be of help to students who will do advanced work with papers and books written in that foreign language is not generally true. Specialized courses for this group of students, such as scientific German, would be of greater value for specialized reading than are the general literature courses.

"There is some argument that the drop in enrollment that would follow the elimination of the language requirement would be detrimental to our excellent language departments. We do not believe that any serious language advocate believes that the uninspired student who is forced to repeat each course until he passes it is an asset to the department. The dropping of the requirement should actually make the departments better ones for the language majors and other serious language students.

"The Advisory Committee advocates the immediate abolition of all foreign language requirements in the College of Arts and Sciences."

Naturally, not all students have gone this far, and colleges vary considerably in their response. The following survey of the status

of FL requirements at fourteen institutions was compiled by Kenneth Mildenberger, Director of Programs of the Modern Language Association.

FL Requirements: Some Status Reports

A random sampling of higher education institutions by MLA last spring brought the following reports (names of correspondents are not included because there was no time to request clearance): Hamilton College, N.Y. -- "The faculty has voted to discontinue all graduation requirements (for the B.A., 12 semester hours had been required, plus 2 years in high school, otherwise 18 semester hours)... Our change has little to do with the pros or cons of language requirements... Spanish shows the greatest loss (over 30%), French is just a little under 30%, and German has maintained about the same enrollment... I want to say that it looks as if a free elective system endangers language study less than the meaningless formality of a requirement that some colleges use for window dressing." University of Mississippi -- "There are no arguments against FL requirements here." Columbia University -- "FL requirements for the B.A. have not been reduced; an effort to do so was made, and it failed. The arguments advanced were part of a broader attack on all required courses." University of Arizona -- "The language requirement for the B.A. has not been reduced or removed, fortunately." Pennsylvania State University -- "As yet, this has not been an issue raised by Penn State students... There have been some changes, however, in the FL requirements for the Ph.D.; the requirement was decentralized as of fall, 1968, and each department was given the liberty to set its own requirement. It is fairly obvious that if the FL requirement were eliminated or reduced, it would seriously curtail our graduate program. Most of our elementary courses are taught by graduate assistants, and most of our graduate students hold assistantships. We don't have enough University fellowships for graduate students to make up the difference." University of Wisconsin -- "I can report that there has been no change since the fall of 1966... There is, however, good reason to believe that our good fortune may be short lived. At the graduate level there has been a loosening of the language requirement for the doctorate on the basis of requests by individual departments. Further, it seems quite likely that before the end of the current year there will be approval for leaving the whole matter of language requirement for the doctorate entirely up to the discretion of departments. At the undergraduate level there are rumblings of discontent which I interpret to be not so much hostility to FLs as resentment toward requirements of any kind... The effects of strong modification of present requirements are clear; reduction of enrollments, curtailment of faculty expansion, reduction in number of graduate assistants, and consequent reduction of size and richness of graduate programs and number of people given professional training."

Bowling Green State University, Ohio -- "There has been no change here in the FL requirement for the B.A. or B.S. degree since the fall of 1966... On the other hand, the FL requirements for the Ph.D.

have been under discussion in our Graduate Council for more than two years, and I believe the requirements may be eliminated, except as they may remain as departmental requirements... The major complaint that I hear is not against the FL requirement as such, but that there is an overemphasis on the development of the speaking skill. Faculty members, especially in the sciences, want us to do more about teaching reading skills." University of California, Irvine -- "As far as I know, there has been no criticism of the FL requirement... I suspect that in other institutions where the FL requirement is under attack, the main reason may be general resentment against any and all requirements... If all specific requirements for graduation are eliminated, then I think that FLs could indeed compete favorably with physics, philosophy, or basket-weaving." University of Colorado -- "The FL requirement for the B.A. has been under such severe attack by students as well as some faculty that a special committee was formed to study the feasibility of modification. We realized that the most strategic approach would be to meet the forces of darkness halfway, since it was obvious that they would have prevailed had we insisted in preserving the FL requirement in its present form. The compromise we arrived at was as follows: The FL graduate requirement for the B.A. should be changed into an entrance requirement of three years of one FL in high school. Students who come with two years only will have to take on additional semester of FL in college (for credit). Students who come with less than two years of an FL in high school will have to make up their deficiency by taking language courses without credit... Our FL requirement for the Ph.D. was modified last year to a requirement of one language of all Ph.D. candidates, at a proficiency of 560 in some languages and 590 in others (on the Princeton Graduate FL Test); this has replaced a two-language requirement of a more modest caliber (in the 400's)... It is true that the anti-FL feeling is part of a larger phenomenon toward abolishing requirements, but there is a special acidity in the arguments against FLs."

University of Michigan -- "We have been the target all year of a campaign against our current requirements in FL, which are about seventeen years old, and which require for the A.B. degree the demonstration of a fourth-semester proficiency in an FL, demonstrated either by test on arrival from high school (600 or above in both Reading and Listening CEEB tests) or by completing a fourth-semester course satisfactorily (i.e., with at least a D)... The attack began by a petition sponsored largely by SDS and supported by a Student Government Council, which despite its name is not very representative, although elected. They collected some 3,000 signatures on a petition for abolition of the FL requirement. The real target was all requirements for the A.B., of which the FL is merely the most unavoidable and unsubstitutable and most onerous, being based on performance rather than on 'sitting-time' in high school... The 'mandate' of the student body, and the insistence of the vocal activists that the faculty must abolish the requirement had some, but not much, support, and the tactics finally put most of the faculty off so much that resentment prevailed over sympathy." (The Majority Report of a Curriculum Committee was passed at a meeting of the university faculty.) "It maintains essentially the present requirement

for the A.B., for all who have not had four years of a language in high school. Those who present four years are deemed to have satisfied the graduation requirement thereby. Further, it is stipulated that the courses taken under requirement may be on a Pass-Fail option, that different 'tracks' of FL study will be established, and that those who take a fourth-semester FL course in an FL other than the one presented for the requirement may count it in satisfaction of the Humanities requirement. All this, of course, is as far as possible from satisfying the student demands, and we shall hear more in the fall."

University of Chicago -- "There is little anti-FL sentiment as such, but FL requirements are in jeopardy as a result of an attack on requirements of any sort. How far such a movement will go is difficult to say at present, but the entire curriculum is under constant study by joint faculty-student committees, and changes will undoubtedly be made. FLs are unlikely to gain by any changes that do occur. The main demand of the more radical at the moment is 'relevance.' While in theory it could be well argued that FLs have never been more 'relevant' to our situation in the world than today, 'relevance' in the present debate is usually attributed to courses that presumably make a direct and immediate contribution to chaning the social environment, and almost all 'academic' subjects are automatically excluded... The most direct result we encounter is the difficulty our graduate students are having in finding positions. For the first time in almost a decade there is a surplus of available teachers in the lower ranks... Obviously, there will be a 'domino' effect if FL requirements are drastically reduced, but I have the impression that there has until now been more panic than actual reduction in requirements." Kalamazoo College -- "The FL requirement for the B.A. has not been reduced or removed; on the contrary, it was strengthened effective 1 June 1967 by the requirement that all candidates for the B.A. and the B.S. comply with the following prescribed work: 'Two intermediate or advanced courses in one foreign language. (This requirement may be absolved by passing a proficiency examination.) Students whose native language is not English will be excused from this requirement.' Unfortunately, this requirement is now under attack by the students. In a recent meeting of the executive committee of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, a student representative stated that students would demand the elimination of FLs for both the B.A. and B.S. degree."

Indiana University -- "One of the last actions of the faculty of the college of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University this year was a modification of virtually all graduation requirements. Opposition to the student supported proposal for complete elimination of the foreign language requirement was so strong that this alternative did not even appear on the ballot... The faculty did, however, vote in favor of a new 'Foreign Culture Requirement.' Under the terms of this requirement, the student's obligation, in the normal course toward the B.A., will be met either by the completion of the fourth semester course (the old requirement) in a foreign language, or by placement examination, or--and this is also new--a grade of A or the equivalent in a third semester course. The faculty, this time supported by the students, voted to uphold the

admission requirement for the College of Arts and Sciences, which is represented by the impossibility of receiving credit for the first year of the first foreign language. The 'Culture' aspect of the requirement... provides, for all students in the basic curriculum, the option of foreign language as specified above, or three courses of a clearly related nature in the history, politics, culture, etc., of a given area of the world. The exact nature of these courses and the way in which they will be devised and administered has not yet been determined."